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ABSTRACT

As local, state, and national educational reform continues to impact professional educators and others who support student learning, all professionals are faced with responding to change in a positive way. The study of educational change over the last 30 years has brought educators to a paradigm breakthrough in terms of how they think and act in relation to change. Fullan's vision of change, which includes eight lessons, embraces the chaotic nature of the forces of change at all levels of society. Since 1995, Missouri's William Woods University has sponsored the Connections Project, which helps regional and area schools ensure that all students succeed in school. Connections is a professional development resource for educators, counselors, administrators, human service providers, and others who work with children and families. In 1998, the Connections staff conducted training sessions for education professionals that highlighted Michael Fullan's research and ideas and encouraged participants to develop group models of the change process. Participants completed surveys on their understanding of Fullan's lessons and their applicability to the school site. Responses indicated that respondents understood Fullan's lessons of change and believed they could affect change using them, but many had not used the lessons in their classroom/school/community since participating in the professional development. Some of the school sites had left the Connections project. (Contains 21 references.) (SM)

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UNDERSTANDING AND USING CHANGE FORCES

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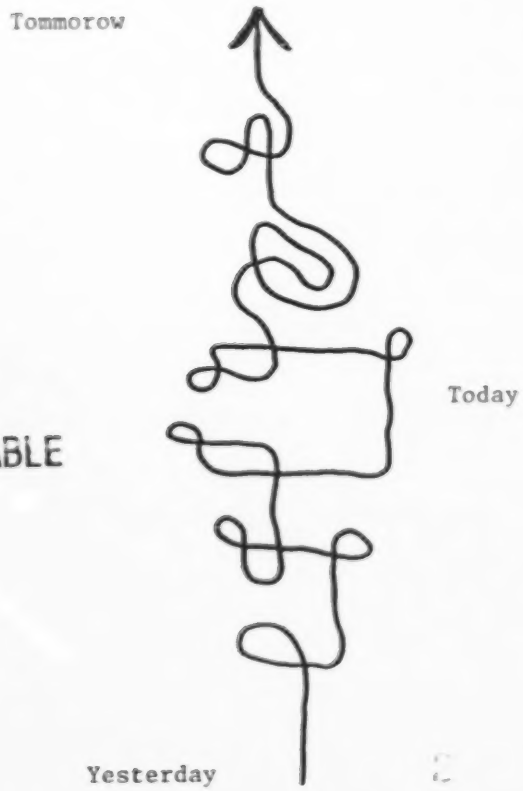

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Statement of the Problem

As educational reform at the local, state, and national levels continues to impact professional educators and others who provide support for student learning, all professionals are faced with the dilemma of contending with change in a positive way. Unfortunately, these professionals may have little understanding of how to cope with change, how to promote effective and long lasting change, or how to assess the quality of the change. Indeed, according to Michael Fullan in Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform (1993), "The individual educator is a critical starting point because the leverage for change can be greater through the efforts of individuals, and each educator has some control (more than is exercised) over what he or she does, because it is one's own motives and skills that are at question" (pp. 12-13).

What We Know About Change Forces: Fullan's Eight Lessons

The study of educational change has been occurring for the last thirty years and has brought educators to a paradigm breakthrough in terms of how we think and act in relation to change. Fullan's vision embraces the chaotic nature of the forces of change at all levels of society (1993). He debunks many of the current myths about the roles of vision and strategic planning, site-based management, strong leadership, consensus, and accountability, and he argues that a new language is required for harnessing the forces of change by highlighting eight basic lessons which have arisen from this new paradigm of dynamic change. Fullan proffers that these lessons are paradoxical and surprising to our normal way of thinking about change. For Fullan, they go together as a set; each lesson symbiotically benefits from the wisdom of the other seven.

Lesson #1 (You Can't Mandate What Matters) derives its theoretical base from such precepts as the notion that what really matters for complex goals of change are skills, creative thinking, and committed action (McLaughlin, 1990); the philosophy that almost all educational changes of value require new skills, behavior, and beliefs or understandings (Fullan, 1991); the one cardinal rule of change: you cannot *make* people change (Marris 1975); and a startling revision of current management theory that involves cultivating and harnessing tension (Pascale, 1990).

Lesson #2 (Change is a Journey, Not a Blueprint) derives its theoretical base from the understanding that even well developed innovations represent journeys for those encountering them for the first time (McMahon & Wallace, 1992); an argument that the chaos theory can be extended to all systems: physical, social, and economic (Stacey, 1992); and a synthesis of twenty years of multicultural research which supports the theory that the attainment of richly enjoyable and fulfilling experiences is within reach of most people providing they first recognize their own self-transformative powers (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Lesson #3 (Problems are our Friends) derives its theoretical base from five case studies illustrating the problems and successes of efforts to plan change (Louis & Miles, 1990) and the precepts required to create a successful learning organization (Senge,1990).

Lesson #4 (Vision and Strategic Planning Come Later) derives its theoretical base from a perspective on how to bring about change in corporations (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990) and a description of shared vision (Fullan, 1992).

Lesson #5 (Individualism and Collectivism Must Have Equal Power) derives its theoretical base from a recognition of the isolationism of teaching which leads to conservatism and resistance to change in teaching (Lortie, 1975); a description of a learning enriched school (Rosenholtz, 1989; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991); the idea that pushed to extremes, collaboration becomes conformity to the group (CRM Films, 1991); and a challenge to the view of conventional psychological wisdom that a person's mental health is only as good as her/his relationships with others (Storr, 1988).

Lesson #6 (Neither Centralization or Decentralization Works) derives its theoretical base from an explanation of what it takes to stay collaborative within a district in terms of personnel moves, transfers, selection and promotion criteria, policy requirements, and budget decisions including staff development resources (Fullan, 1993).

Lesson #7 (Connection with the Wider Environment is Critical) derives its theoretical base from an argument for the necessity of maintaining a proactive stance toward the environment (Smith, 1984).

Lesson #8 (Every Person is a Change Agent) derives its theoretical base from the argument that the "age of reason" has become bastardized, while common sense and moral purpose have been buried (Saul, 1992).

Professional Development for Change

The Connections Project

Since February 1995, William Woods University, through a grant funded by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, has been the sponsoring institution for the Connections Project, a project designed to help regional and area school districts meet the primary goal of Missouri's Outstanding Schools Act: ensuring that all students are successful in school. Connections Project has been providing professional development to rural school sites of educators and related professionals to enable them to access and link local community services for the purpose of supporting students in at risk situations.

Connections is a professional development resource for regular and special educators, counselors, administrators, human service providers, and others working directly with children and families. Programs are developed around the belief that all children can meet high expectations if they come to the classroom ready to take advantage of the learning opportunities

Connections programs strive to unite the efforts of educators and human service providers so they may work collaboratively for the well being of children and their families. The ultimate goal of Connections is to enable school districts to look at children in the context of their families and their communities and to work closely with the health and human services resources that are available in their communities. Virtually all activities of the individual public school sites require change, both institutional (bureaucratic) and individual.

Fullan's Eight Lessons

To address this need, as part of the ongoing professional development activities provided by Connections, the Connections professional staff conducted an October 1998 training session for thirty education and other professionals from eleven public school districts on the topic of change forces and developing models of change. During the hour and a half session, the Connections professionals (1) highlighted the research and ideas described by Fullan to support the efficacy of each

of the eight lessons for participants at each site and (2) encouraged the participants to develop group models of their change processes. In November 1998, another presentation of this information was delivered to teachers and administrators of the local school district, one of the Connections sites. Then, in January 1999, participants in the October session were surveyed as to their understanding of Fullan's lessons and the applicability of these lessons at the respective school sites. In addition, one participant in the November session was asked to document how Fullan's lessons had impacted him.

Participants' Responses

From The October Session

Ten participants responded to the follow-up questionnaire sent to the thirty participants from the October session. Nine participants responded fully to the survey. The tenth respondent answered no questions and indicated she/he could not remember the eight lessons of change because most of the Fullan information had been presented in a lecture style format which was not effective for her/his long term retention.

Nine respondents indicated they understood Fullan's eight lessons of change. (One participant commented that Fullan's ideas represent a "sensible, realistic view of what forces are in play in changes.")

Nine respondents indicated they believed they could effect change by utilizing Fullan's eight lessons for change.

Again, nine respondents indicated they believed that the individual educator is the starting point for effective change. (One participant commented, "It takes some need to want to change." Another participant commented, "Every person is a change agent.)

And again, nine respondents indicated they believed that Fullan's model of change effectively describes the change process. (One participant commented, "Obviously, the process was developed by someone who has been there and through it.")

The final survey question asked respondents to comment on the following statement: To be effective, change must include the following. The respondents answered: (1) "ownership by those who it affects--shared vision--patience and

enthusiasm"; (2) "support from all/most participants"; (3) "idea--action plan--carrying our the plan. Flexibility is another key."; (4) "moral purpose and change agentry"; (5) "desire for change, goals, commitment of those who must implement change. Funding or creative use of funds."; and (6) "stress--collaboration--reflection--more change."

However, only three participants cited having used Fullan's eight basic lessons of change in their classroom/school/community since participating in the professional development experience. This response is a most disquieting postscript to the other very positive comments made by the nine respondents which indicated the respondents "understood" Fullan's lessons. Why, then, have only three of the nine participants actually used these lessons in their classroom/school./community?

Perhaps the six respondents from the October session who cited not actually having used these lessons in their classroom/school community were not as fully cognizant of Fullan's eight lessons as they assessed themselves to be. As Michelle Whipple notes in "Unraveling a Web Change: A Case Study of Factors Affecting the Self-Initiated Changes of One Sixth Grade Language Arts Teacher," Change is a complex web of experiences and influences, not all of which are acknowledged by the teacher (1995). This is Fullan's point: awareness of all experiences and influences is inherent to the successful interplay of Fullan's lessons.

From the November Session

The superintendent of the local school district provided the following response when asked to document an immediate application he was able to make from the professional development experience during the November session. He wrote,

> During your presentation on Fullan's Change Forces, you mentioned a video entitled Groupthink. You stated that his video was a docudrama which depicted NASA's behind the scenes decision-making that contributed to the Challenger disaster. You said the video showed how poor decisions can be made when people are unwilling to go against the wishes of the group, even though they may have specific reasons for believing the decision being made is flawed.
>
> Shortly after the professional development day, I requested to borrow the video so I could show it to members of our administrative team. After watching the video, we had a brief discussion about the importance of everyone speaking their mind, regardless of how they thought the

group might react.

> At a recent administrators meeting, I once again referred to the Groupthink video, this time in reference to a campaign that is being designed to work for passage of a series of propositions the School Board has placed on the April ballot. Referring to the video, I told the administrators that I would rather someone disagree with the approach we're taking, as opposed to everyone agreeing on the wrong thing.
>
> . . . The information you presented to us will serve us well as we look for ways to improve our school district. It also has allowed us to design a more effective campaign which has the potential to help meet the needs of the district for many years to come.

The local superintendent, through recognizing a need to take into account opposing views about how to organize the campaign, demonstrated Fullan's Lesson #2 that Change is a Journey, Not a Blueprint. He seems to have experienced the self-transformative experience which Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has described.

From the School Sites

Since 1995, the Connections Project has worked with nineteen school districts. Fourteen school districts participate in the program currently. Five school sites have left the project. Two of these sites indicated they felt they were able to continue their programs without the assistance of the Connections Project. The other three sites listed funding shortages, lack of personnel and time, and the inability to develop a community team as reasons for discontinuing their relationship with the Connections Project.

Perhaps these reasons are rationalizations by the sites for their inability to seek out and confront the real problems which are, in fact, difficult to solve, a reason Fullan (1993) gives as to why we can not develop effective responses to complex situations.

Conclusion

Guskey's research (1995), highlighting a perspective other than Fullan's, reveals that attitudes and beliefs change at the conclusion of reform rather than in the beginning. If educators and other related professionals lack understanding of the contradictory forces involved in educational reform, and if as Gusky's research (1995) seems to indicate, attitudes and beliefs change at the conclusion of reform rather than

in the beginning, then, the six respondents from the October session who have not used Fullan's lessons and the three school districts that ceased working with the Connections Project may still be in the process of coming to understand the reality of the reform with which they are involved.

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